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ABSTRACT

The Intercurricular Studies Division at Miami-Dade Community College offers a two-semester interdisciplinary, experiential approach to general education. This division is autonomous and maintains its own full-time faculty. Its major teaching unit is the module, an interdependent component of four instructors with experience in communications, natural science, social science, and psychology. Each four-member module has responsibility for approximately 145 students who enroll in the division for a minimum of four courses. Traditional teaching and evaluation methods are supplemented with field work and other activities. The first semester curriculum begins by having the student consider his/her current skills and behaviors, then examine how he/she functions and how he/she became the person he/she is, and finally explore and decide which behaviors, values, and attitudes he/she wishes to maintain, acquire or delete. The second semester focuses on the student's interaction with his/her environments, focusing on natural and social systems and changes in them and on effective change. Several curricular practices that are part of the division are: relating the fact and theories of the disciplines, a close relationship between student and teacher, affective objectives, application of theory, experiential learning, taxonomic level of objectives, variety of activities and instructional methods, and evaluation based on performance. The report concludes with a sample of student comments. (KL)

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THE INTERCURRICULAR STUDIES DIVISION: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SUCCESS

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THE INTERCURRICULAR STUDIES DIVISION: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY SUCCESS

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In the ten years following the turbulence of the sixties, with its incessant demands by students for change and relevance, many two year colleges made attempts to establish new interdisciplinary programs. Some of these programs were never firmly established because they never solved the problem of gaining academic respectability and subsequently never solved the economic problem of securing an adequate student enrollment. Other new programs such as the Intercurricular Studies Division of Miami-Dade Community College did become firmly established and economically productive. The Intercurricular Studies Division, usually referred to as the I-Division, began its first year of operation in 1971, with a student enrollment of less than 3,000 credit hours. Nine years later it began the fall term with an enrollment of more than 9,000 student credit hours.

The expressed purpose of the division is to provide a cost-effective alternative general education program for a heterogeneous student population. The I-Division was approved as an interdisciplinary division having the same autonomy as the more traditional Divisions of Humanities, Social Science, and Natural Science. Thus it has a full time faculty trained in English, philosophy, literature, sociology, psychology, zoology, biology, chemistry and mathematics. The major teaching unit in the I-Division is called the module. The

module is an interdependent complement of four instructors with expertise in communications, natural science, social science, and psychology. Each four member interdisciplinary unit has responsibility for approximately 145 students who voluntarily enroll in the division for a minimum of four courses.

Curriculum Overview

Courses taught in the modules are the same courses that are taught in traditional departments. Faculty on the South Campus of Miami-Dade Community College, who teach the same courses teach the same course objectives. However, students in the I-Division are also expected to accomplish additional objectives because they are asked to take the knowledge acquired through the original course objectives and apply it to their own lives and to the world in which they live. While the I-Division offers a variety of interdisciplinary course combinations, the major curriculum offering is a two semester interdisciplinary, experiential approach to general education. In each four course, twelve credit offering, traditional teaching methods are widely supplemented with field work and other experiences in which the student is given an opportunity to actively acquire the information, skills, and attitudes he will need in his life. The various discipline courses, then, are treated, not as separate courses, but as different and interrelated approaches to concepts and problems.

The Part I Curriculum focuses on the individual and addresses the question, "How can each of us be the person he would like to be?" Each student answers this question for himself by examining facts and

theories from the fields of natural science, social science, sociology, psychology, and communications. The student begins by considering his current skills and behavior. Then he examines how he functions and how he became the person he is. As the culmination of his first semesters work, each student will explore and make some judgements about his behavior patterns, values, and attitudes he wishes to maintain, acquire, or delete.

The social science component of the part I curriculum seeks to make students aware of the complex social forces which shape their attitudes and behaviors. The psychology component focuses on human behavior from a psychological and emotional point of view. A range of strategies is used to make students aware of how they see themselves and why. Students are encouraged to explore the possibilities for pushing back self-imposed limits and for increasing their satisfaction in their own abilities.

The English component of the part I curriculum has a dual purpose. First, it attempts to meet student's needs for proficiency in the formal aspects of reading and writing. During the first week of each semester, students are given a comprehensive analysis of reading and writing skills. Second, the I-Division is concerned with society's increasing reliance on the spoken word as the dominant means of interpersonal communications and instruction. Consequently, the curriculum also emphasizes those verbal and non-verbal skills which are fundamental to successful non-written communication. The natural science course emphasizes the necessity of healthy nutritution, stesss reduction,

exercise, and personal pollution control in the development of an optiomal health maintenance life style plan. Current topics in human genetics such as inherited diseases, genetic manipulation, and evolution are explored in search of one's own genetic potential. Research discoveries on the aging process and preventative medicine are discussed relative to longevity. The part I curriculum is divided into three goal areas: (I) Determining Where You Are, (II) How You Became The Person You Are, and (III) Being The Person You Want To Be. In goal three the goals are integrated into a final evaluation by the student. Having a working knowledge of where he is, how he functions, what determines his individuality, and what ultimate limits of life he must face, the student is prepared to integrate this knowledge into the genesis of a life plan. At this point in the curriculum cognitive and affective objectives merge as the student, armed with a comprehensive body of cognitive knowledge, is in a position to make some decisions about his future.

The Part II Curriculum focuses on the student's interaction with his natural and social environments. It addresses the question, "How can each of us more effectively interact with and control the forces of our natural and social environments. Each student answers this question for himself by examining facts and theories from the fields of natural science, social science, human relations, and communications. The student begins by identifying and examining current U.S. problems, constraints encountered in nature and society, and the global framework of many problems facing humanity. As the

culmination of his semesters work, each student engages in a project in which he integrates the knowledge he has gained, plans a solution to a social or environmental problem, and evaluates his proposed solution. There are three goal areas in the Part II Curriculum: (I) Natural and Social Systems, (II) Natural and Social Change, and (III) Making Change. Again, each discipline makes a contribution to the student's exploration in these three goal areas. For example, in goal I the English objectives help the student understand how resource materials are organized in a library and how these materials can be used in writing correctly documented, well researched papers. In goal II the English component looks at social and personal changes as they are reflected through characters in literature. In goal III students view change in a broader sense by viewing literature as a creator and reflection of social change.

Curriculum Practices

On the basis of its philosophy, goals, and assumptions about learning, several curriculum practices have become a part of the division. These include:

1. Whenever possible, the facts and theories from one discipline are related to those of other disciplines, since an individual discipline is rarely the sole source of knowledge for a human experience or problem. Students are encouraged to understand the relationships among disciplines and to apply what they learn from one discipline to their study in other areas.

2. A close relationship between instructors and students (co-sharers in the learning process) is fostered. The "family" has been a successful method for developing this relationship in a safe learning environment.
3. Affective objectives as well as cognitive objectives have an important place in the curriculum.
4. Whenever possible students should apply theoretical learning in real situations.
5. Experiential learning activities are encouraged as opportunities for students to become more personally and immediately involved in the learning process.
6. Consideration is given to the taxonomical level of objectives. Objectives involving the evaluation process are recognized as being of a higher order than objectives involving the recall of facts.
7. Because students learn in different ways and have different backgrounds, skills, needs, and academic abilities, a variety of activities for accomplishing objectives are provided whenever possible.
8. The lecture method is only one approach and may not be appropriate for many application, analysis, and evaluation type objectives.
9. The evaluation of students is based on demonstrable performance. An instructor will evaluate a student as an individual, and not on a competitive basis with other students.

10. Written test and examinations are only one kind of evaluation, and may not be valid measures of performance to meet certain objectives.

Every member of the Intercurricular Studies Division has a responsibility to the basic philosophy and tenets that are the foundation of the division. To that end no person is an isolated individual. The I-Division is an interdisciplinary collection of individual professionals who have worked hard to develope an atmosphere of academic cooperation and trust without compromising the integrity of their own disciplines. In the final analysis, the central guiding principle of the division is that we are here to help students. We believe we can do that best by providing them with support and a safe learning environment as well as with our discipline expertise. As long as our students are aware of our conscious efforts to help, the probability of a continued student population seems greatly increased. A small sampling of some impressions by last years student's give some evidence to student responses to the program.

1. "My impression about the program at first was scary because it looked too organized to be true. I would recommend it to anyone."
2. "The "I" Division is an exciting new approach to the tedium of required classes."
3. "You learn things you can use in your daily living, not material that once they teach it you would never hear about it again."

4. "The "I" Division is completely different from any learning concept that I have ever experienced. One of the differences that I enjoy is having the same pupils in all of my classes. This difference makes it much easier to get to know my fellow classmates. The family meetings are very enlightening and also helps to build a friendly relationship between teacher and student. This is very different from the impersonal way most classes are taught. The new concepts in learning although different, will help students such as myself learn more and at a faster rate."
5. "The traditional system of the recall of information seems dull and ineffective by comparison."
6. "Its teachers are well informed of our generation and tend to get right down to our problems and needs."
7. 'The Intercurricular or "I" Division has thus far proved to be good learning experience. We have learned to find out about others and their thoughts, beliefs and ideas. The teachers are showing how subjects, thought of as being so different, are really very closely related. The combined efforts of the teachers makes for a more thoroughly covered lesson."
8. "I also knew a lot of the other students who recommended "I" Division to me."

9. "This unity among teachers and students in this "I" Division gave me a feeling of belonging not only to this new school where I had come for the first time but to this family we now form. I feel this way of studying in the "I" Division will improve myself as a person because everyone is willing to give."

10. "I don't hate school like I use to."

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